

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA

DUBLIN DIVISION

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|------------------------------|---|------------|
| JEAN CARLO RAMIREZ-CARRANZA, |) | |
| |) | |
| Petitioner, |) | |
| |) | |
| v. |) | CV 322-054 |
| |) | |
| STACEY N. STONE, Warden, |) | |
| |) | |
| Respondent. |) | |

MAGISTRATE JUDGE’S REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Petitioner, while serving a federal sentence at McCrae Correctional Institute in McRae-Helena, Georgia, filed the instant § 2241 habeas petition, arguing he is eligible for time credit under the First Step Act. (See generally doc. no. 1.) Respondent first moved to dismiss arguing Petitioner had not exhausted his administrative remedies, then Respondent filed a supplemental motion to dismiss for mootness. (Doc. nos. 6, 8.) The Court thus **REPORTS** and **RECOMMENDS** the motions to dismiss be **GRANTED**, (doc. nos. 6, 8), and that this case be **DISMISSED** without prejudice, this civil action be **CLOSED**, and an appropriate judgment of dismissal be **ENTERED**.

I. DISCUSSION

A. The Petition is Moot

Petitioner filed the above captioned case on May 26, 2022. On July 27, 2022, Petitioner was released from Bureau of Prison (“BOP”) custody after serving a federal drug conspiracy sentence at McRae Correctional Institute. (Doc. no. 6, p. 1.) As Petitioner is the subject of a

detainer from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”), he was transferred out of BOP custody into ICE custody that day. (Doc. no. 6-1, First Ward Decl., ¶ 7 & attachs. 3, 4; doc. no. 8-1, Second Ward Decl., ¶ 4 & attach. 1.)

The jurisdiction of federal courts is limited by Article III of the Constitution to “Cases” or “Controversies.” Soliman v. United States, 296 F.3d 1237, 1242 (11th Cir. 2002). “[A] case is moot when it no longer presents a live controversy with respect to which the court can give meaningful relief.” Barrera v. United States Attorney Gen., 557 F. App’x 877, 881 (11th Cir. 2014); Soliman, 296 F.3d at 1242. If events occurring after the filing of a petition deprive the Court of the ability to provide meaningful relief, then the case is moot and must be dismissed. Mobley v. Palm Beach Cnty. Sheriff Dept., 783 F.3d 1347, 1352 (11th Cir. 2015) (citing Soliman, 296 F.3d at 1242); see also Spencer v. Kemna, 523 U.S. 1, 7 (1998) (“[T]hroughout the litigation, the plaintiff ‘must have suffered, or be threatened with, an actual injury traceable to the defendant and likely to be redressed by a favorable judicial decision.’”) (citation omitted). Because mootness is jurisdictional, dismissal is required if no case or controversy remains. Id.

Petitioner seeks federal time credit under the First Step Act to be applied toward his sentence in order to obtain an earlier release from BOP custody. (See doc. no. 1, p. 3.) However, as of July 27, 2022, he is no longer in BOP custody. Thus, no case or controversy remains for which the Court can grant meaningful relief, and this proceeding must be dismissed.

B. Petitioner Failed to Exhaust Administrative Remedies

1. The Exhaustion Requirement

Even if the petition was not moot, Petitioner failed to exhaust administrative remedies before bringing his petition. Prisoners seeking habeas relief, including relief pursuant to § 2241, have long been subject to administrative exhaustion requirements. Davis v. Warden, FCC Coleman-USP I, 661 F. App'x 561, 562 (11th Cir. 2016) (*per curiam*); Santiago-Lugo v. Warden, 785 F.3d 467, 474-75 (11th Cir. 2015); Rodriguez v. Lamer, 60 F.3d 745, 747 (11th Cir. 1995). Although exhaustion of administrative remedies is not a jurisdictional requirement in a § 2241 proceeding, “that does not mean that courts may disregard a failure to exhaust and grant relief on the merits if the respondent properly asserts the defense.” Santiago-Lugo, 785 F.3d at 474-75; see also Fleming v. Warden of FCI Tallahassee, 631 F. App'x 840, 842 (11th Cir. 2015) (*per curiam*) (same). Indeed, as the Supreme Court has explained, “Because exhaustion requirements are designed to deal with parties who do not want to exhaust, administrative law creates an incentive for these parties to do what they would otherwise prefer not to do, namely, to give the agency a fair and full opportunity to adjudicate their claims.” Woodford v. Ngo, 548 U.S. 81, 90 (2006). Moreover, courts have followed a general rule not to “topple over administrative decisions unless the administrative body not only has erred, *but has erred against objection made at the time appropriate under its practice.*” Id. (emphasis in original). Therefore, “[i]n order to properly exhaust administrative remedies, a petitioner must comply with an agency’s deadlines and procedural rules.” Davis, 661 F. App'x at 562.

The BOP “has established regulations governing formal review of inmate complaints relating to any aspect of imprisonment,” codified in 28 C.F.R. § 542.10 *et seq.*; United States v. Lucas, 898 F.2d 1554, 1556 (11th Cir. 1990) (*per curiam*).

The regulations require an inmate to first attempt informal resolution of the issue according to that BOP facility's informal resolution and complaint process. 28 C.F.R. § 542.13. If the issue remains, the inmate must file a formal written Administrative Remedy Request with the Warden. Id. § 542.14. After the Warden responds, the inmate may appeal to the BOP Regional Director, and may appeal the Regional Director's decision to the BOP General Counsel. Id. § 542.15. If an inmate does not receive a response to any request or appeal within the time allowed for a response, the inmate is to treat the lack of response as a denial of the request or appeal. Id. § 542.18. An inmate has only exhausted the administrative remedies process after conclusion of the appeal to the BOP General Counsel. Davis, 661 F. App'x at 562.

The same exhaustion requirement applies to private prisons not operated by the BOP, such as McRae Correctional Institute. See Pri-Har v. Corr. Corp. of Am., 154 F. App'x 886, 887-88 (11th Cir. 2005) (*per curiam*). Similar to the process outlined above, inmates at McRae must (1) file a grievance locally with the Warden in accordance with McRae's grievance procedures, (2) appeal the Warden's decision to the Administrator of the BOP's Privatization Management Branch, and (3) appeal the Administrator's decision to the BOP General Counsel. (Doc. no. 6-1, First Ward Decl. ¶¶ 9-12); see Figueras v. Johns, No. 5:17-CV-12, 2017 WL 4227393, at *4 (S.D. Ga. Sept. 20, 2017) (noting inmates at private prison must appeal to Privatization Management Branch and BOP General Counsel), *adopted by*, 2017 WL 5197019 (S.D. Ga. Nov. 9, 2017). If an inmate files an administrative remedy concerning a BOP-related matter, the request will be recorded in the BOP's SENTRY computer database. (First Ward Decl. ¶¶ 14-15.)

2. Petitioner Has Not Exhausted Available Administrative Remedies

Where, as here, Respondent has filed a motion to dismiss based on failure to exhaust administrative remedies, the Eleventh Circuit has laid out a two-step process for courts to use in resolving such motions. First, the Court looks to the factual allegations made by both parties, taking the petitioner's version as true where they conflict, and if in that light the petition is subject to dismissal for failure to exhaust the full administrative remedies process, the respondent's motion will be granted. Turner v. Burnside, 541 F.3d 1077, 1082-83 (11th Cir. 2008) (citing Bryant v. Rich, 530 F.3d 1368, 1373-74 (11th Cir. 2008) (citations omitted))¹.

If the petition is not subject to dismissal at the first step, then at step two the Court makes specific findings to resolve the disputed factual issues, with Respondent bearing the burden of proving Petitioner has failed to exhaust his administrative remedies. Id. Based on its findings as to the disputed factual issues, the Court determines whether the prisoner has exhausted his available administrative remedies and thus whether the motion to dismiss should be granted. Id. Because exhaustion "is treated as a matter of abatement and not an adjudication on the merits, it is proper for a judge to consider facts outside the pleadings and to resolve factual disputes so long as the factual disputes do not decide the merits and the parties have sufficient opportunity to develop a record." Bryant, 530 F.3d at 1376.

Here, there is no dispute Petitioner did not exhaust his administrative remedies. With his motion to dismiss, Respondent has attached a declaration by Kimberly Ward, a Senior Secure Institution Manager at the BOP, which includes a review of the SENTRY database for

¹Although Turner involved exhaustion requirements within the context of a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action, it is also applicable to a § 2241 proceeding. See Blevins v. FCI Hazelton Warden, 819 F. App'x 853, 856 (11th Cir. 2020) (*per curiam*) (applying Turner to a § 2241 proceeding).

administrative remedy requests filed by Petitioner. The declaration and attachments show Petitioner never submitted any formal administrative remedy requests during his time at McRae Correctional Institute. (First Ward Decl. ¶¶ 4, 13-15 & attach. 7.) While Petitioner attached to his petition a May 6, 2022 memorandum responding to an inmate inquiry regarding time credits, the addressee's name is redacted. (Doc. no. 1, p. 4.) Ms. Ward explains the May 6th memorandum was actually addressed to another inmate at McRae and not responsive to any inquiry or grievance Petitioner filed. (First Ward Decl. ¶ 16.) Indeed, Petitioner concedes he did not exhaust administrative remedies in his petition and he did not respond to the motion to dismiss. (See doc. no. 1, p. 1.) Petitioner claims exhaustion was not required due to the futility of timing, because, as evidenced in § I(A) *supra*, his release was imminent; however, Petitioner is still required to exhaust even if his release is imminent. See Gonzalez v. United States, 959 F.2d 211, 212 (11th Cir. 1992) (*per curiam*) (specifically rejecting the argument that exhaustion is unnecessary when a petitioner argues presumptive or imminent release), *abrogated on other grounds*, Santiago-Lugo, 785 F.3d at 474-75; Ross v. Wells, No. CV 312-025, 2012 WL 1453593, at *2 (S.D. Ga. Apr. 17, 2012) (explaining exhaustion requirement should be enforced even if inmate claims release date has passed), *adopted by*, 2012 WL 1453592 (S.D. Ga. Apr. 26, 2012) (Bowen, J.).

3. Futility Does Not Excuse Exhaustion

Prior to the Eleventh Circuit deciding exhaustion is not a jurisdictional requirement in § 2241 cases, there was a suggestion of a possible futility exception to the exhaustion requirement. See Jaimes v. United States, 168 F. App'x. 356, 359 & n.4 (11th Cir. 2006) (*per curiam*) (questioning whether futility exception exists). However, more recent Eleventh Circuit precedent clarifies that all § 2241 petitioners must comply with the requirement of

administrative exhaustion. Fleming, 631 F. App'x at 842; Santiago-Lugo, 785 F.3d at 474-75; see also Moore v. Colon, Case No. 20-22032-CV-GAYLES, 2020 WL 5868179, at *3-4 (S.D. Fla. July 27, 2020) (collecting cases requiring exhaustion of administrative remedies before bringing § 2241 petition), *adopted by*, 2020 WL 5848687 (S.D. Fla. Sept. 30, 2020); see also Johnson v. Florida, 32 F.4th 1092, 1095-96 (11th Cir. 2022) (requiring state prisoner to exhaust all available state remedies prior to seeking relief under § 2241, rejecting futility argument, and affirming dismissal of claims for failure to exhaust).

This Court has consistently recognized that futility does not excuse exhaustion. See Viera v. Dunbar, Civ. Act. No. 2:21-CV-79, 2022 WL 2376618, at *4 (S.D. Ga. June 7, 2022) (“It is not the role of the court to consider the adequacy or futility of the administrative remedies afforded to the inmate”) (citing Higginbottom v. Carter, 223 F.3d 1259, 1261) (11th Cir. 2000) and Varner v. Shepard, 11 F.4th 1252, 1264 (11th Cir. 2021), *cert. denied*, 142 S. Ct. 1172 (2022)), *adopted by*, 2022 WL 2374387 (S.D. Ga. June 30, 2022); Mena v. Garrett, Civ. Act. No. 2:19-cv-124, 2020 WL 5245225, at *4 (S.D. Ga. Aug. 13, 2020) (explaining petitioner must exhaust even though BOP will likely reject his constitutional claims), *adopted by*, 2020 WL 5245125 (S.D. Ga. Sept. 2, 2020); see also Colon, 2020 WL 5868179, at *4 (agreeing court’s role is not to consider futility of administrative remedies).

Furthermore, courts considering the issue of calculation of time credits under the First Step Act have enforced exhaustion requirements and rejected futility arguments. See Viera, 2022 WL 2376618, at *4 and n.4 (requiring petitioner to administratively exhaust First Step Act earned time credits claim despite perceived futility); Richards v. Dunbar, Civ. Act. No. 2:21-cv-69, 2022 WL 2375182, at *3-4 (S.D. Ga. June 8, 2022) (same)), *adopted by*, 2022 WL 2374386 (S.D. Ga. June 30, 2022); Perez v. Joseph, Case No. 3:22cv2055-MCR-HTC, 2022

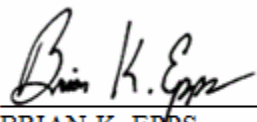
WL 2181090, at *2 (N.D. Fla. May 4, 2022) (same), *adopted by*, 2022 WL 2176505 (N.D. Fla. June 15, 2022). Even if a futility exception existed, Petitioner has not shown any extraordinary circumstances warranting application of such. See Fuller v. Rich, 11 F.3d 61, 62 (5th Cir. 1994) (noting futility exception only available in “extraordinary circumstances,” and requires the petitioner to “bear[] the burden of demonstrating the futility of administrative review.”) (*per curiam*).

Thus, in addition to the case being moot, this petition should be dismissed without prejudice because Petitioner has not exhausted all available administrative remedies prior to filing this case. Because the petition should be dismissed based on lack of exhaustion and mootness, the Court need not address the alternative grounds for dismissal raised by Respondent in his initial motion to dismiss. Holdago v. United States, Civ. Act. No. 5:19-cv-9, 2019 WL 5681217, at *3 (S.D. Ga. Oct. 31, 2019), *adopted by*, 2019 WL 635869 (S.D. Ga. Nov. 26, 2019).

II. CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, the Court **REPORTS** and **RECOMMENDS** Respondent’s motions to dismiss be **GRANTED**, (doc. nos. 6, 8), the petition be **DISMISSED** without prejudice, this civil action be **CLOSED**, and an appropriate judgment of dismissal be **ENTERED**.

SO REPORTED and RECOMMENDED this 3rd day of October, 2022, at Augusta, Georgia.


 BRIAN K. EPPS
 UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE
 SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA